



## Boyd Cabin Protected

*C. 1872 FREEDMAN'S CABIN WAS ON THE VERGE OF COMPLETE COLLAPSE*



After many months of preparation, including detailed documentation, a group of dedicated volunteers worked for two weeks to disassemble the cabin. All of the logs and historic material have now been treated and safely stored.

We could not have done it without the amazing group of people who came out and worked so hard! A special thank you to Taylor Barnhill and Rob Kraft with the Appalachian Barn Alliance for their expertise throughout the process.

The future of the Boyd Cabin has not yet been determined and we are exploring what options might be available. Even though the material has been safely stored, the condition of the logs is a continued concern. Working with the property owners, we hope to create a plan for the cabin's reconstruction.

Be sure to visit [PSABC.org](http://PSABC.org) and join our mailing list to stay up to date as this collaborative project progresses. Plus learn about more of our projects, education events, advocacy, and small grants throughout the community and the impact being made in all of Buncombe County.



## Charlotte St. Demo Update

RCG/Killian, developers for the proposed 101 Charlotte Street project, have withdrawn their application for conditional zoning. While we are pleased that the developers are no longer moving forward with that project, the future of this block remains uncertain and there are a number of complicated zoning issues at play.

Shortly after withdrawing their application, they moved forward with a submittal to demolish four homes on Baird Street with plans to replace them with 19 townhouses.

We are disappointed that after acknowledging in a quote to the Asheville Citizen Times that they were not moving forward "principally because of a lack of city support", that they have not taken the feedback of the community to heart and worked to develop a project with more support.

The Baird Street demolition and 19 townhomes do not require special permission, making it hard to fight. The developers have said they are open to receiving questions, comments and suggestions at [101Charlottestreet@gmail.com](mailto:101Charlottestreet@gmail.com) and we hope anyone who is concerned about the project will reach out.

We encourage the developers to save the Baird Street homes and the homes on the rest of the block and use a more sensitive infill approach to create additional density. Walking the block, it is clear to see that there is plenty of space for growth without a large scale demolition.

We are against the demolition of these homes for a number of reasons, but one argument for preservation which often seems to get ignored is the environmental impact of demolition and new construction.

During the community debate over Charlotte Street we were shocked and thrilled to draw the attention of Carl Elefante. An architect and activist, Carl uses his voice on a global level. Here is a glimpse from his website on what has kept him busy this year:

"For 2021, Carl is engrossed in two major advocacy initiatives. Locally, Carl is working with the District of Columbia Preservation League (DCPL) to conduct a series of six public programs exploring

*continued on p. 3*

## Local Historic Designation & Protections

Preservation occurs in many unofficial ways. When a person conducts regular maintenance on their old house they are preserving their important place. Historic structures are invaluable resources that share stories through their craftsmanship, materials, and changes over time. When a place is preserved, it adds to the collective story of the historic built environment. The documentation and continued preservation that comes from governmental authorities can provide benefits for property owners as well as protections on the property.

The options for "official" historic preservation are pretty limited throughout the US and in the state of North Carolina. These include preservation easements, designation in the National Register of Historic Places, and local historic designation. While preservation happens informally, through individual property owner stewardship for example, we are going to focus on the impacts of designation and specifically designation at the local level.

In Asheville and Buncombe County, local historic designation is overseen by the Historic Resources Commission (HRC) and staff with the City of Asheville. This commission was established in 1976 to assist in protecting the significant historic fabric of our community. HRC provides oversight for buildings, sites, and districts that are currently designated as local historic landmarks or districts. They also operate as a Certified Local Government which means that they take on some responsibilities from the State Historic Preservation Office and provide recommendations on new nominations for the National Register of Historic Places. They also provide guidance to local governments on issues related to preservation.

Local Landmarks include places like the S&W Cafeteria and the South Asheville Cemetery. These landmarks are integral to documenting our collective history. Buildings or structures are required to demonstrate a high level of significance for individual designation and they are subject to oversight by city staff and HRC. This means that the story of the place must be compelling, whether through the design or the association with a person or event; they are meaningful representations of the past that are still standing. Because of that, property owners of Local Landmarks are

also given tax incentives as a way to reinvest in those properties to ensure their continued maintenance.

Designation at the local level also includes Local Historic Districts (LHDs). These districts are areas where the story is told through a collection of buildings and structures rather than by one individually significant place. There are four LHDs in Asheville and Buncombe County. These are Montford, Albemarle Park, St

*The only way to permanently protect historic places in North Carolina is through the placement of a preservation easement.*

Dunstan's, and Biltmore Village. Like Local Landmarks, the LHDs are subject to design review by city staff and the HRC for modifications on existing buildings. Additionally, new construction and infill projects are also subject to review by HRC.

Current options for designation of historically significant sites are systems that were created to document and preserve. Thorough documentation means that the community retains information about a place regardless of what happens to it in the future. Designation, especially on the National Register of Historic Places, does not require much oversight. While local level designation provides greater oversight, property owners can still move forward with a demolition after a waiting period.

In the case of the recent demolition threat of thirteen National Register homes in the Chestnut Hill district, residents were shocked to find out that the National Register of Historic Places offered no protection from demolition. The only way to permanently protect historic places in North Carolina is through the placement of a preservation easement.

Preservation easements operate like other legal easements placed on private property. More familiar versions are for driveways or utility poles. In this case, an easement is a legal agreement between a property owner and a qualified preservation organization, like PSABC, that restricts the development of or changes to a privately owned property. The property owner promises to protect

the property's historic integrity. The organization is granted the right to enforce the covenants of the easement and to monitor the property. The owner retains the right and duty to manage and care for the property, pay taxes on it, and can live and work in the building just as before. The major benefit of a preservation easement is the security of knowing an important property is protected in perpetuity. There is also a possible benefit from certain tax advantages that result from

the donation.

Local landmark and LHD designation have substantial indirect benefits to the property owners as well as the codified ones. Property values in LHDs tend to be higher than adjacent neighborhoods and steadily see increase, including in times of economic uncertainty. Property owners have greater voice and influence in new development they see in their neighborhoods. LHDs tend to be walkable areas that promote a reduced need for cars. Historic structures also tend to be built with integrated passive systems for energy conservation. Additionally, stopping or delaying demolition of historic structures helps to ensure the embodied carbon within existing buildings is conserved.

Designation doesn't mean a person loses control of their property. It encourages preservation through a series of codified benefits while also contributing many indirect advantages for the property owner. Historic preservation is a tool that communities can use to help address some of the biggest challenges of our time including displacement and climate change. Pursuing designation, especially at the local level, allows for property owners to have a strong voice in their neighborhoods while contributing to their collective stories.

Contact Erica LeClaire at [erica@psabc.org](mailto:erica@psabc.org) for more information about historic designation and preservation easements.

# From the Executive Director



*We have been busy!*

Our programming continued to be different this year due to COVID - but it didn't slow us down! As you read through this newspaper, you will get a sampling of the things we have been up to this year. We are proud of what we have accomplished, but our minds are already on 2022.

We are currently under contract to purchase two critically endangered properties. If all goes as planned, we hope to be able to make an announcement about their protection early next year. PSABC has a long history of purchasing, protecting and selling endangered properties and we are excited to return to this strategy for saving important places.

We dipped our toe into the world of walking tours this year and plan to expand that programming next year. We also hope that 2022 will see the return of our other in-person programming, including (fingers crossed) the Time Traveling Gala! As always, we will be focused on growing the number of properties permanently protected through preservation easements, providing technical support, education programming and our grant program.

We hope you will consider using the enclosed envelope to support us into 2022 and beyond.

We say it year after year, but it feels especially true this year – we could not do it without you! Thank you to our supporters, volunteers, Board and staff. The last few years have not been easy, but the incredible group of people that make the work we do every day possible, never ceases to amaze me. Thank you for your passion, patience, dedication, humor, support and so much more!

Sincerely,

Jessie Landl  
Executive Director

## Our Mission

To conserve Asheville and Buncombe County's heritage and sense of place through preservation and promotion of the region's historic resources.

# 2021 Board and Staff

PRESIDENT  
Amy Hornaday

VICE PRESIDENT  
Josi Ward

TREASURER  
William Eakins

SECRETARY  
Cynthia Watson

Katie Adams  
Jennifer Cathey  
Carol Hensley  
Bruce Johnson  
Betty Lawrence  
Michael Logan  
Benjamin Mitchell  
David Nutter  
Kieta Osteen-Cochrane  
Cate Scales  
Tracy Veteto  
Jeanne Warner

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
Jessie Landl

DIRECTOR OF PRESERVATION  
Erica LeClaire

FINANCE & OPERATIONS MANAGER  
Jamie Moody

# \$12,000 in Preservation Grants Announced

*As usual, our most recent grant cycle was competitive with great applications for projects with a range of scopes. We are excited to announce the Fall 2021 Preservation Grant winners!*

**\$5,000 awarded to Shannon Rose** for installation of a French drain at her c.1930 West Asheville house as a first step in addressing water intrusion concerns.

**\$2,000 awarded to Black Mountain College Museum + Art Center** for phase two of a project to restore and protect frescoes in the Studies Building. For more information on the fresco restoration that won a 2021 Griffin Award, visit our website at PSABC.org.

## FROM THE APPLICATION:

In fall 2020, BMCM+AC completed a project to mediate damage, repair, and conserve two frescoes, *Inspiration and Knowledge*, painted by luminary of the Mexican Mural Renaissance Jean Charlot along with Black Mountain College students in the summer of 1944. These evocative, site-specific pieces, created in the true fresco style, had suffered from fading, molding, and surface damage from graffiti and repeated cleaning over the past 77 years.

Following conservation efforts, these landmarks can now be appreciated and enjoyed by generations to come as the last remaining artworks at the historic, former Black Mountain College campus.

Our next phase, for which we are now seeking funding, will be the installation of protective barriers to prevent further degradation of the murals, and educational efforts including signage to explain to

Rockmont campers, property owners and stakeholders, LEAF festival goers, BMC enthusiasts and other visitors to the site the historical and cultural significance of the murals.

**\$2,500 awarded to the Railroad and Incarcerated Laborers (RAIL) Memorial Project** for educational signage at Swannanoa gap in the Ridgecrest. Check out the website [therailproject.org](http://therailproject.org) for more information on this project.

## FROM THE APPLICATION:

The RAIL Memorial Project seeks to find tangible ways to honor and memorialize the incredible work and tragic sacrifice of over 3,000 incarcerated laborers, over 90% of whom were African American, who built the railroad up the mountain from Old Fort to Swannanoa in the late 1870s.

The Mountain Division of the Western NC Railroad was constructed between 1875 and 1879. The work was brutal and the conditions were severe. Over 95% of the labor was provided by prisoners—about 3,000 men and a few hundred women. Most were African American. They were shipped in boxcars from the Raleigh penitentiary to the end of the rail line at Henry Station (where Mill Creek Road joins Old US Hwy 70). History tells us that the prisoners—many who had formerly been enslaved—were, more often than not, wrongly convicted on inadequate or false evidence. Their sentences were for terms much longer than those imposed on white people. For these incarcerated railroad laborers, prison was an extension of slavery.

The Mountain Division ran from Henry Station to the western end of the Swannanoa Tunnel at Ridgecrest. By straight line, these points are 3.4 miles apart, but the prisoners cleared and smoothed the path and laid 9.4 miles of rails, as many curves and

loops were required to climb 1,002 feet in elevation. Seven tunnels were pounded through solid rock, with bare muscle aided by black powder and some nitroglycerine. Many convicts died. The track became a graveyard.

An exact count of deaths was never kept, but at least 139 people perished. The death toll may be closer to 300. When a prisoner died, another would be brought from Raleigh.

Currently, there is little written in public spaces about the tremendous and unwilling sacrifice made by these incarcerated workers to connect the railroad to Asheville.

**\$2,500 awarded to the Kenilworth Residents Association (KRA)** for educational signage recognizing George Gibson and his family's contribution to the neighborhood and the South Asheville Cemetery.

## FROM THE APPLICATION:

Several years ago, the KRA, in concert with representatives from the African American community that has long been a vital part of Kenilworth, embarked on a quest to re-name a creek that runs through the neighborhood after Louise Gibson, a beloved longtime resident. The community was able to have the creek officially re-named Gibson Creek and then celebrated the naming at St. John A Church here in Kenilworth that stands adjacent to the cemetery where nearly two thousand African Americans are buried, dating to slavery times. A handcrafted wooden marker indicating this name change was created and placed on private property by the creek, but the plan has always been to install large interpretive signage that would document the history of George Gibson and his family and the neighborhood in which they have long resided.



# GRANT PROGRAM

## More Information About Our Preservation Grant Program

We look forward to helping with emergency stabilization projects and restorations of important places, to helping neighborhoods receive designations such as recognition on the National Register of Historic Places and to encouraging and supporting new and unique education and research opportunities. We want to be surprised and humbled by the projects our community asks us to support!

As our city faces the inevitable challenges of growth, PSABC's voice and reach must expand. The important addition of this Preservation Grant Program comes in response to the needs of our community.

In 2022, we will be offering up to \$20,000 in grants (individual grants will be from \$500 – \$5000) to the public in three categories:

### 1. Bricks-And-Mortar

Rehabilitation, restoration and repair of structures that are 50 years of age or older.  
*Some examples: Windows and doors, exterior painting, porches, roofs and gutters, electrical and plumbing, hardscaping, foundation, and original exterior or interior details*

### 2. Public Education

Development of educational materials and programs that advance knowledge of our shared history.  
*Some examples: Research and documentation, oral histories, installations specific to buildings, place history, and culture, exhibitions, K-12 educational publications, seminars and lectures, and documentary films*

### 3. Planning, Survey and Designation

Planning and design for building rehabilitation and restoration projects, historic resource surveys and local or national designations.  
*Some examples: Historic building condition reports, engineering and rehabilitation plans, feasibility studies, historic resource surveys, updates of previous surveys, and local and national historic designations*

**Check out PSABC.org to see past grant recipients and to learn about the upcoming Spring submission deadline.**

# HELP PSABC LAWYER UP

BY BILL EAKINS  
PSABC BOARD TREASURER

Our preservation battles seem to be coming more frequently. They can be sudden and intense.

All sorts of legal issues arise, often with little notice and short windows for action. And there we are trying to retain a lawyer, waiting for conflicts checks or faced with firms who would rather represent a developer with deeper pockets. To be credible opponents we need developers and officials to be aware that we have the capacity to participate in appeals.

In short, we need to put counsel on retainer who will be there at a moment's notice when we need them.

Also, day in day out, when acquiring properties and easements legal issues can abound. The frequency of these issues is increasing.

We have several member attorneys who have helped with a lot of our legal matters pro bono, and we appreciate them. They do and have done great work. However, the pressures on Asheville and Buncombe County preservation have passed a point where PSABC can rely on pro bono alone.

Please consider using the enclosed envelop to donate to our legal fees and retainers fund so that we will be ready for the work and battles to come.



# THANK YOU CATHERINE MITCHELL

The Preservation Society of Asheville and Buncombe County wants to thank Catherine Mitchell and her firm Fox Rothschild LLP, who offered their services pro bono and worked tirelessly to represent us in our efforts to stop the proposed demolition of 13 historic homes for the 101 Charlotte Street development.

The support, guidance, expertise and passion Catherine provided over many months was invaluable!



Ask a Preservationist

**Q. Is it OK to paint my brick house?**

**A.** A recent trend in renovation has been for people to paint their originally unpainted brick features, whether that’s the exterior of the house or an interior brick chimney. Historic brick features have at times been finished with a coat of paint, but that isn’t always the case. Adding a coat of modern paint to originally unfinished brick can have long term consequences.

Brick is a porous material that is naturally breathable. For exterior brick, when painted with a waterproof coating, that movement is restricted or stopped altogether. This restriction increases the chance of causing more significant damage as moisture gets trapped inside the tiny inner channels. The practical concerns when brick is painted are peeling paint and physical damage to the brick. When taking a broader look, however, there are other lasting impacts that could be detrimental when the decision to paint brick is made.

Another concern about painting brick, or jumping onto other decorating and design trends, is the reversibility. Changes and adaptations to a historic home to make it functional and comfortable in a modern context is important. Some changes though are irreversible and can make it impossible to retain the historic fabric of the home. Along with that, trends are just that – trends. They don’t last for very long and once a trend falls out of fashion (think acoustic tile drop ceiling or carpet over hardwood floors) if the work is irreversible, you might be stuck!

A question and design challenge for historic home owners is then how to maintain materials and integrity while allowing for a functional, modern space. The answer to this question is varied. It depends on the particular space, materials, and location among other things. A good start is to gather inspiration from the historic materials and features of your home to curate a space that is both timeless and functional.

Have a question, send to [erica@psabcorg](mailto:erica@psabcorg)



Charlotte St. Demo Update

Continued from page 1

the role of historic preservation in meeting DC’s ambitious climate action targets. Internationally, Carl is working with the AIA, Architecture 2030, and the Climate Heritage Network (CHN) preparing for the 26th UN Conference of the Parties (COP-26) in Glasgow, Scotland.”

We were honored that he took time to consider the threat on Charlotte Street. Though we are uncertain about the future of the Charlotte Street project, we think his thoughts on the project are important to share.

Connecting Through Space and Time

© CARL ELEFANTE 2021

Since the dawn of civilization, cities and towns have connected people through space and time. Their form and condition shape economic and social interaction. Their durability weaves a tapestry that expresses the character and values of multiple generations. Every building and site, every addition and subtraction to neighborhood fabric, either strengthens or weakens those connections, facilitates or frustrates those interactions, and leaves a legacy or damage that lingers.

Consider the forms and conditions along the Charlotte Street corridor in Asheville. Who do they connect and how? What sorts of economic and social interactions do they facilitate? What messages are conveyed from past to present?

The stretch of Charlotte Street from the I-240 overpass to Grove Park Country Club is a patchwork quilt. There are prominent institutions, many professional service firms, retailers scaled to the surrounding neighborhood and others vying for the attention of passing vehicles, housing that spans the gamut from the iconic Manor Inn to stately homes with manicured yards, meticulously restored single-family homes, other historic houses subdivided into affordable apartments, and accessory dwelling units.

Charlotte Street is a case study in adaptive re-use. The number of century-old residential properties that remain as dwellings is notably fewer than those converted to business use. Commercial structures have always been interspersed along the corridor. Most have been converted from neighborhood shops to retailers dependent on easy vehicular access. Charlotte Street is also a case study in redevelopment by demolition. Like the conversion of early retail structures, most replacement buildings were planned to accommodate cars with surface parking lots occupying street frontage.

To my eyes and ears as an architect who has devoted a career to breathing new life into existing buildings, neighborhoods, and towns, the form and condition of Charlotte

Street deliver two clear and urgent messages. First, the corridor will be irreversibly damaged with the loss of any more pre-WWII structures. In subtracting even a handful of historic buildings, especially houses, the foundational era of Charlotte Street will be gone forever. Second, in contrast with the practices of the last several decades, the continuing evolution of Charlotte Street demands a larger and more comprehensive vision. New construction along Charlotte Street since WWII has been quite extensive; yet, the whole is not greater than the sum of its parts, far from it.

Today, it is neither responsible nor ethical to plan activities as resource-intensive as building without understanding climate impacts. Since targets in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change were established in 2015, the roadmap for eliminating greenhouse gas emissions from the building sector has disseminated around the world. Every nation, every community, is dutybound to “decarbonize” buildings, transportation, industry, and agriculture by 2050 at the latest. There is very little time to waste.

The 2021 edition of the International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) incorporates the Zero Code Appendix. Progressive communities like Asheville are adopting the Zero Code to make zero-net energy (ZNE) performance their code standard. It is both practical and economically feasible for buildings the scale of most constructed in Asheville. Like Asheville’s traditional houses with south-facing porches, operable windows, and other daylighting and ventilation features, ZNE buildings must be sited, shaped, and outfitted appropriate to their microclimate. Roofs, walls, windows, doors, and foundations must provide an integrated thermal and moisture envelope to keep interior conditions comfortable through daily and seasonal fluctuations. Any and all energy-consuming equipment and appliances must be electric and high-efficiency. And finally, all annual power needs must be met with a combination of on-site and off-site non-polluting renewable energy. The ZNE formula is tried and true. There are examples to follow for nearly every building type. The time for launching the Zero Code in Asheville is now.

This said, mandating ZNE performance addresses only operational emissions – from occupying buildings. To eliminate all building sector emissions by 2050, embodied emissions must also be zeroed-out – those produced manufacturing building products and from construction. By the time it is ready to occupy, a typical conventionally-

constructed building emits as much embodied carbon pollution as it does operational emissions over twenty years (unless it is a ZNE building).

Adopting the Zero Code and wrestling with embodied emissions are both crucial for plotting an appropriate course for the evolution of Charlotte Street. The most practical and available strategy for countering the much thornier challenge of embodied emissions is simple enough: retain and renew existing buildings.

Having coined the phrase “the greenest building is one that is already built” many years ago, these days I get asked whether it still applies in today’s era of climate change. The answer is simple: even more. The most comprehensive remodeling of an existing building produces an embodied carbon footprint a fraction of constructing a new building. While it varies according to building and construction type, my project experience shows that keeping and renovating existing buildings avoids 50% to 75% of the embodied emissions of an equivalent new building. In other words, up to four existing buildings can be fully modernized for an equivalent carbon footprint constructing a single new building.

Current levels of carbon pollution (some 20 billion tons annually) must be brought to zero in the global building sector. To quote Bill Gates on the subject: “The world has never done anything this big. Every country [every city and town] will need to change its ways.”

Charlotte Street is a case study in adaptive re-use. The number of century-old residential properties that remain as dwellings is notably fewer than those converted to business use.

It demands retrofitting buildings to comply with ZNE performance standards – virtually all buildings, even historic buildings. It requires a complete understanding of the existing building stock, developing retrofit models that are appropriate to each building and construction type, implementing policies and programs that exponentially accelerate retrofits, and tying operational emission reductions to embodied emission investments. Retrofitting two existing buildings to ZNE standards avoids enough operating emissions to “pay for” the embodied emissions of both retrofits and constructing a new building of similar size.

Want to build a 95,000 square foot (sf) development along the Charlotte Street corridor? Retrofit 190,000 sf of existing buildings to ZNE standards. Want to build a 150,000 sf development there? Zero-out the emissions from 300,000 sf of existing buildings. Without mandating the Zero Code and countering new building embodied emissions with existing building operational reductions, proposed development is a lose-lose scenario for Charlotte Street and Asheville.

Thank You To Our 2021 Business Members

Landmark Business Leaders



CATE SCALES  
REALTOR/BROKER



GRIFFIN ARCHITECTS, P.A.



Partners in Preservation



Friends in Preservation



# The History & Impact of PSABC’s Grant Program

In 2018, PSABC Board member Amy Hornaday suggested it was time for us to start a preservation grant program. From the beginning, the program had the support of our staff and Board... even though we didn’t know if we would be able to raise the funds to support the program and we didn’t know if people would apply for the grants if we did!

At the 2018 Time Traveling Gala, we put the concept to the test and asked our guests to raise their hands to support the new program. We should have never doubted the commitment of our preservation community because that night, before we truly knew what the program would be, we received donations exceeding our \$20,000 goal and the grant program was born.

## Then the applications came rolling in!

They were for projects we knew and loved and from others we had never heard of but couldn’t wait to be a part of. In every round of grants, our Board has approved more than we budgeted for, to make sure worthy projects get the support they need. In the three short years that followed, we have funded \$77,400 in preservation projects.

Many times, the progress is slow, but we are excited to share some updates on projects we have funded.

### South Asheville Cemetery

The South Asheville Cemetery began as a burial ground for enslaved people and is the oldest public cemetery for African Americans in Western North Carolina. The first known caretaker was a man named George Avery. Enslaved, Mr. Avery was owned by William Wallace McDowell, of the Smith-McDowell house, who entrusted him as the manager of the cemetery located on the family property.

Though it is thought to be the final resting place for 2000 African Americans, there are only 93 headstones with name and date information. Other graves were marked with field stones or handmade crosses making proper care of the grounds extremely important.

In 2019, PSABC awarded a grant of \$5000 towards a National Register nomination for the cemetery. This year, the nomination was approved and the South Asheville Cemetery is now recognized on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 2020, PSABC funded a \$5000 grant to the Western North Carolina Historical Association (WNCHA) for their work to uncover individual stories of people buried in the cemetery as well as “African-American burial grounds in the larger Asheville area and how county, state, and federal policies have passively and actively contributed to the deterioration of these

sacred places in a way that has not equally impacted the final resting places of whites.” This year, WNCHA Executive Director, Anne Chesky Smith, did a series of virtual education programs on the cemetery and her research which can be found at PSABC.org.

### SoundSpace@Rabbit’s

Built in 1948, Rabbit’s Tourist Court was a premier African American motel of its time. After sitting vacant for more than a decade, the family who owned Rabbit’s for five generations was all that stood between this iconic place and almost certain demolition. Multiple offers to purchase the property were ignored before Claude Coleman Jr. and Brett Spivey shared their vision for a music rehearsal space, soul food kitchen and cultural landmark called SoundSpace@Rabbit’s.

In 2019, PSABC provided a \$5000 grant towards phase one of the rehabilitation project. Today, the website advertises SoundSpace@Rabbit’s as “a music rehearsal and art studio facility” which will soon “include the soul food café Areta’s by Chef Clarence Robinson, and a multi-artist murals project.”

### Priscilla Robinson and UrbanRenewalImpact.org

For more than a decade, Priscilla Robinson has worked to collect and document stories of urban renewal in Asheville’s Southside community. In 2021, PSABC supported this work with a \$3000 grant and shortly after, UrbanRenewalImpact.org went live.

“The Urban Renewal implementation resulted in economic changes, life, and physical disruptions- a community root shock. In an effort to share our stories, this website invites contribution from all community members impacted in Asheville. The website’s contents predominately represent what happened on the Southside of Asheville, NC. My vision is that this website will serve as our voices.” UrbanRenewalImpact.org

One of the most exciting features of the site is the interactive map that allows you to visit properties impacted by urban renewal and learn about the people who live there. We encourage everyone to visit UrbanRenewalImpact.org!

What started just a few years ago is already showing far reaching successes in our community



**Top:** South Asheville Cemetery in the Kenilworth neighborhood.

**Middle:** Claude Coleman, Jr. and Brett Spivey during the rehabilitation of Rabbits into SoundSpace@Rabbit’s on McDowell Street in Asheville.

**Bottom:** Priscilla Robinson at the New Bethel Baptist Church On South French Broad Street.



## THREE ASHEVILLE HOMES PERMANENTLY PROTECTED

In 2000, longtime Asheville resident, artist and animal lover, Molly Wiebenson, passed away. Before her death, Molly generously established a trust to manage three homes she owned on Claxton Place. For twenty-one years, the trust was to manage the homes as rental properties and donate the income to local non-profits. Finally, the homes were to be donated to PSABC for permanent protection.

One of the homes was passed to PSABC in 2010 and sold at that time, providing the funding to hire an Executive Director for the organization the next year. The new owner of the log cabin home worked with PSABC on a rehabilitation and an addition and continues to live there today.

In July of this year, the other two homes were signed over to PSABC. One sold in October and the sale of the final home is

expected to be complete in the next couple of months. The buyers for both homes are excited to bring new life to the homes through the rehabilitation process.

All three homes are historic and will now be protected through preservation easements. We doubt Molly could have imagined how meaningful her gift would be to PSABC all these years later. We think of her often and her legacy will be carried on through our work for many years to come. Thank you Molly Wiebenson!

To learn more about planned giving, contact Jessie Landl at [jessie@psabc.org](mailto:jessie@psabc.org).

Thank you to our wonderful members, hard-working volunteers and supporters.  
*Join us! [psabc.org](http://psabc.org)*



# Permanently Protected: A Cabin in the Cove

BY RAY HEARNE

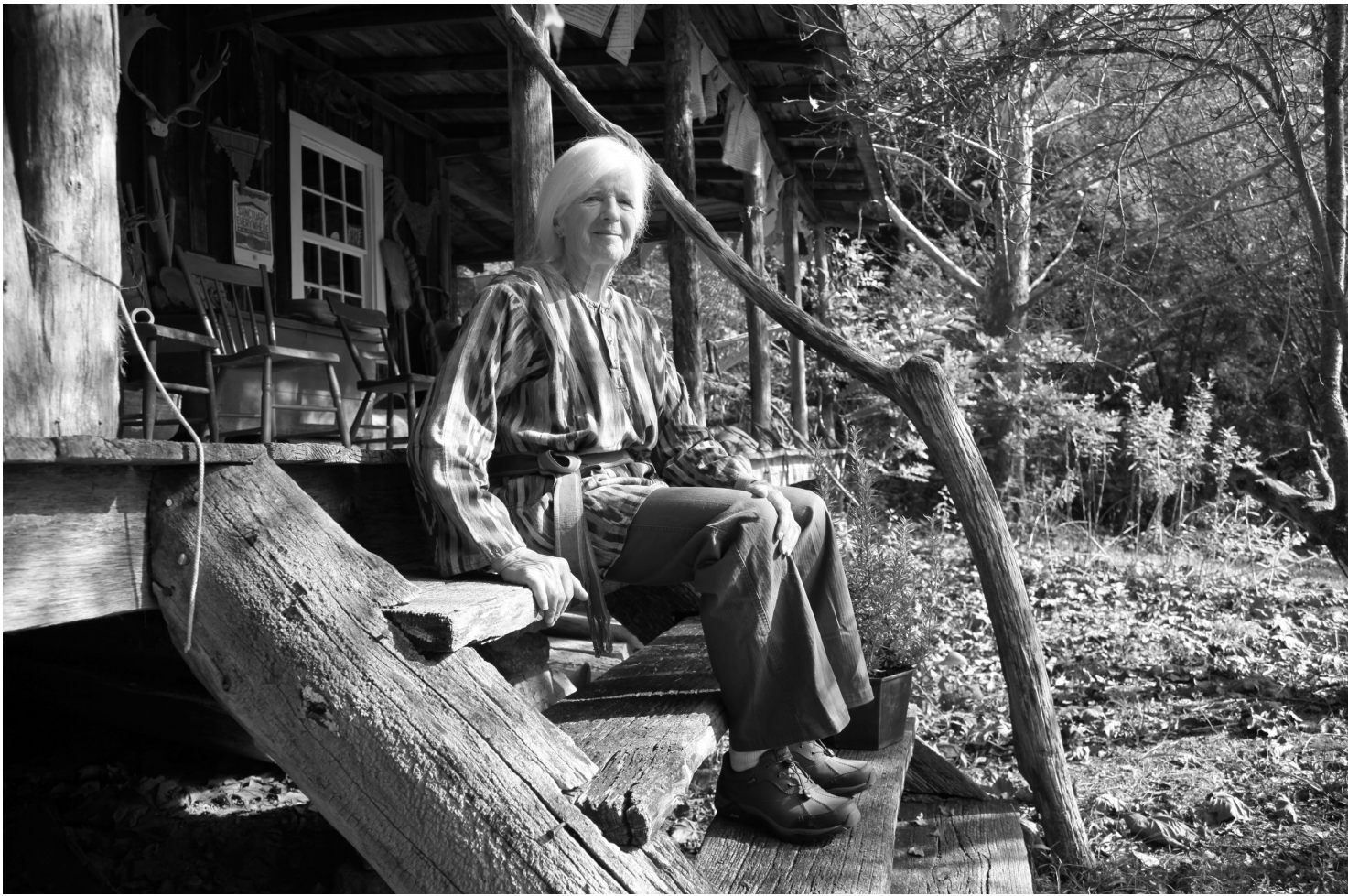
*This summer, we were excited to accept the donation of a preservation easement in Sandy Mush, a rural part of Buncombe County. This easement will permanently protect a meticulously restored and maintained 1860s board and batten cabin. Not only will this incredible historic treasure be preserved for future generations, the property owner has taken steps to additionally preserve the surrounding cove through a conservation easement with the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy. A great friend of PSABC, Ray Hearne has shared some of her story of finding and fixing her home.*

It was more than 50 years ago that I first came to western North Carolina, on an exploratory trip from Pennsylvania with my sister Kate and her husband, Fairman Jayne. We wandered around these mountains, even venturing into Tennessee. Eventually Kate and Fairman and my parents, Charles and Miriam Hearne, who were ready to leave their Chester County PA farm, found land in Big Sandy Mush, Buncombe County.

During the 1960s through the 1980s, I often drove down from my 1798 stone house in Muddy Creek Forks, a tiny village in York County, PA. By the 1990s I too envisioned finding a cove of my own and my sister Ellen who was at that time working in real estate called me with a tantalizing description of a 60+ acre watershed cove with an old house and barn.

Before arriving, I'd dreamt that my future house would be missing its front steps and sure enough the old board and batten house had no steps to its decaying porch. It sat near the front of the south facing property, sheltered by Yellow Mountain rising behind it. I was immediately fascinated by the impressive brick chimney with its stone base, the elegant fireplace surround and mantle, and the stone spring box opening where earlier inhabitants drew their water. According to local hearsay, no one had lived here for at least 50 years, except squirrels, snakes, birds etc.–all finding easy entry through missing windows.

Having worked in historic preservation in York County, PA, as well as restoring my historic house, I wasn't fazed by the decrepitude of this little structure, redolent with unknown stories. In January 1992 I signed a purchase contract with Joseph and Kathy King.



During the 1990s two brothers who live on their farm across the valley, James and Donald Reems, cleared the yard of brambles and debris and the house of wildlife and clutter. They rebuilt the wraparound porch where needed with long lasting locust boards and replaced the rotten posts, also with locust. They removed an enclosure on the east porch that had been added many years ago. An elderly man, Mr. Justice, came by and regaled me with a tale of how he and a dozen siblings had lived here and that the house was “very old” when he was 10 years old. James and Donald used their mountain living skills to jack up the house, stabilize its stone feet, and with chain saws (no electricity) cut openings for additional windows. Like many simple small houses here there were few windows. They installed long oak windows my parents had collected when the Vanderbilt Hotel replaced windows, perhaps in the 1970s.

On working holidays from PA I scraped and scrubbed walls and floors and found a vintage interior door. In 1998 a carpenter, Bill Evans, lived in the house with his St. Bernard, Tiny, for about 9 months. He stripped away decaying wall material and the sagging ceiling remnants. He insulated and hammered in local sawed and planed tulip poplar for the exterior walls, rebuilt the old

loft and constructed a new loft on the western side and much more. The dead minimal electric service was replaced and plumbing installed. Rather than pump water from the spring to the southwest of the house, a line from an abundant spring up the hill to the east brings “gravity” water, not dependent on electricity. At last, in 2000 the house was livable and I moved in.

Over the years since, I scraped, cleaned, and painted some of the woodwork, had the old metal roof cleaned and painted, and an artist friend, Peggy Kurtz, stenciled copies of 1800s stenciling from my PA house on the two plaster board walls. After much cleaning of the original narrow tongue and groove floors, I coated them with nontoxic natural finishes. In every situation requiring attention I've focused on the historic and cultural character of this small house where families perhaps as early as the late 1860s have lived. Restoration efforts included the repointing as needed of the unusual brick chimney. This delicate and time consuming work was done by David Carpenter who used mortar similar to the original with no cement. The springhouse was rebuilt on the original concrete foundation with its channel for spring water where milk and produce were kept cool. The spring box, similar to others in this region, resembles a fireplace but of

course with cold water! Two masons reset the stone surround, using no mortar. Salamanders and crayfish enjoy the always flowing water.

My efforts with restoring and maintaining my house (as well as replacing the decrepit barn) would have overwhelmed me and I would have probably fled if not for the ongoing, patient and good-humored assistance, advice and storytelling of Vance Garrett, Sandy Mush native and historian. Not to mention all the firewood he dragged out of the forest and split for my woodstove! Through the years living here, on my land protected by the conservation easement with Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, I have restored habitat for native flora and fauna. I named my place Cove Gaia, in honor of the earth that sustains all life. And I am incredibly grateful to the Preservation Society of Asheville and Buncombe County and the staff of the WNC State Historic Preservation Office for encouraging me to protect this small building as a fairly rare example of a simple rural mountain home. The placing of the preservation easement, recorded in July of 2021, as well as the conservation easement are my legacy.

## YMI Receives Significant National Parks Service Grant

The YMI Cultural Center has recently received a substantial grant from the National Park Service for preservation of their incredible building. The Young Men's Institute was opened in 1893 as a community center for African American men. A loan from George Vanderbilt funded the building of the YMI and was repaid in the early years of the community center.

The Biltmore connection was strengthened by the designer, architect Richard Sharp Smith, as well as the number of Black craftsmen who worked on the Biltmore for whom the YMI was being constructed. The YMI was a contrast to the segregated YMCA and gave members of the Black community in Asheville a safe place to learn, conduct business, and gather. Over the years, the building has undergone significant change and intervention to ensure its maintenance and continued use as a resource for Asheville's Black community.

Currently, the YMI Cultural Center has an ongoing capital campaign to ensure its future. This grant is funded by the Historic Preservation Fund and earmarked for places with particular significance to the history of Civil Rights and African Americans. Though the nearly \$500,000 grant will go a long way for essential repairs, there is still a significant amount of work to be funded. For more information on the YMICC's Capital Campaign and their incredible work, go to [ymiculturalcenter.org](http://ymiculturalcenter.org)

## A Demolition in Montreat?



The Montreat Conference Center, also known as the Mountain Retreat Association (MRA), has proposed a large new structure for accommodation and meeting space on the property where Galax House, Chestnut Lodge, and the Lord Apartments now sit. Their proposal includes the demolition of these three existing lodges and destruction of 59 mature trees on the property.

What is at stake with this proposal is not just a few old buildings, but the historic marker of the birth of this community. Now, the Town of Montreat holds the power to solidify Montreat as a charming historic mountain retreat. The alternative will be a signal to developers that the door is wide open for the destruction of what makes Montreat so special. There is no doubt that this is a crossroad.

Members of the community have proposed an alternative approach, a Village Con-

cept, however, the MRA has rejected this alternative and officially and explicitly closed the door to any further dialogue with those who seek an alternative. MRA has submitted a permit application to the Town of Montreat for their original proposal and as of this publication, the Board of Adjustment hearing is ongoing.

Saving these buildings may not be the easiest or the most profitable way for the MRA to reach their goals, however, it is what is best for the future of the entire community and will not prevent the MRA from developing a successful project. We urge the MRA and the Town of Montreat to make decisions with the whole community in mind.

PSABC has provided support and expertise, but the fight has been led by the local community including the Montreat Stewards. We thank them for their dedication to this important effort!

For more on Montreat and these lodges, visit our website at [PSABC.org](http://PSABC.org) and read Dale Slusser's Architectural Tidbits on the topic.

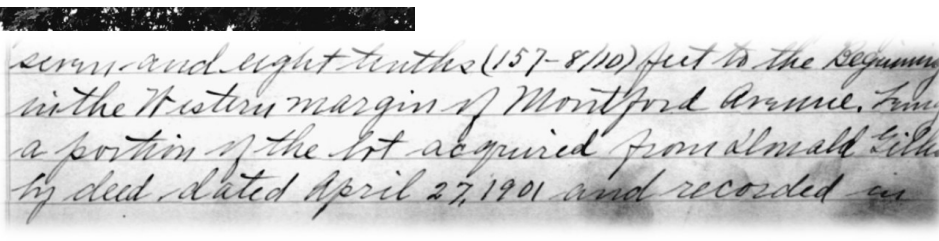
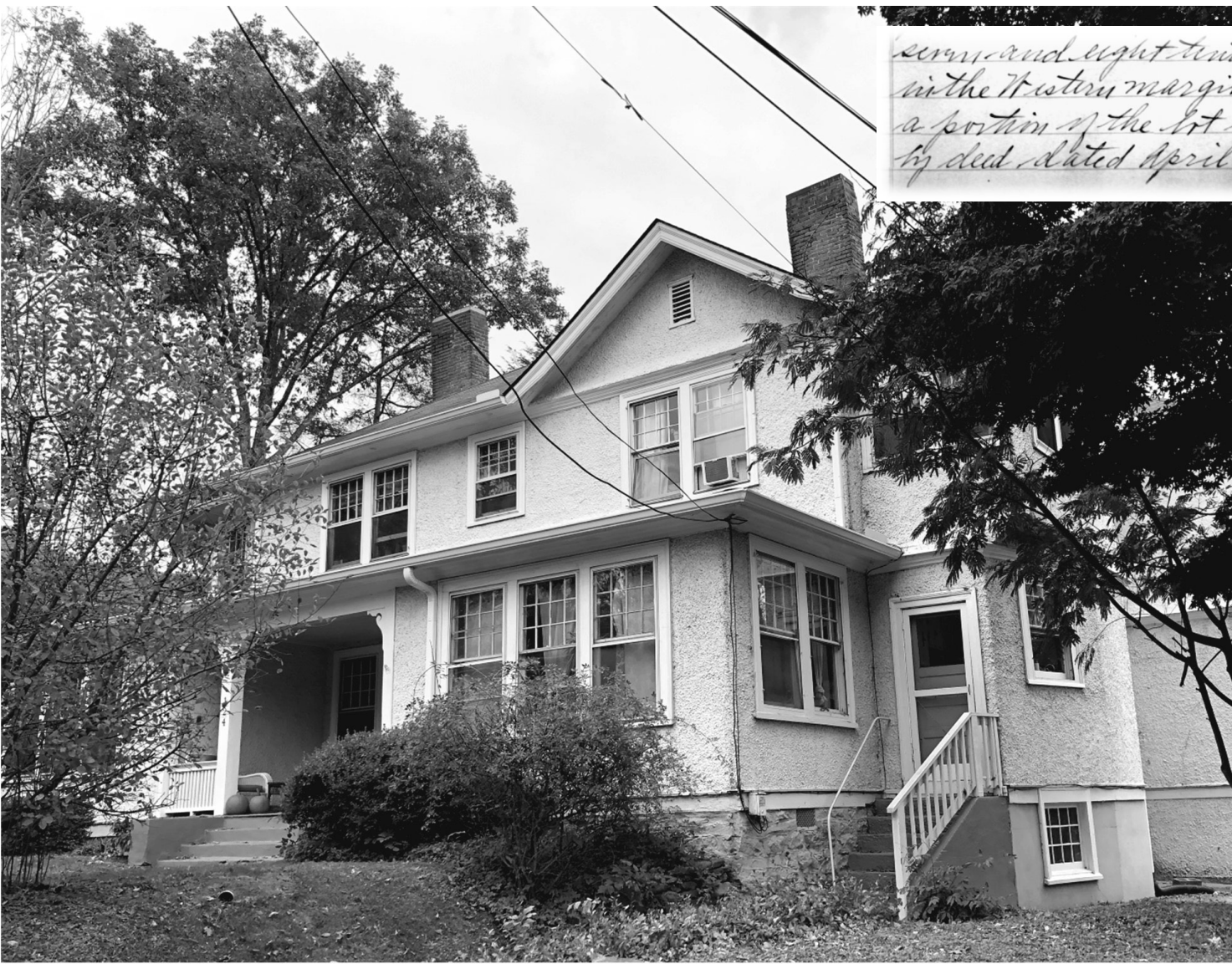
For more information about how you can get involved and updates on this demolition threat, visit [montreat-stewards.org](http://montreat-stewards.org)

## ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN JENNIFER CATHEY WINS PRESERVATION RECOGNITION

This fall, Jennifer Cathey was recognized by our colleagues across the state with Preservation North Carolina's Robert E. Stipe Professional Award. Jennifer has been an invaluable member of PSABC's Board of Directors, including serving as our board president. As a staff member of the State Historic Preservation Office, she dedicates her wealth of knowledge to preservation efforts throughout western North Carolina. Jennifer has also contributed to PSABC's mission through volunteering with events and providing technical expertise to staff on a regular basis. From being a docent on historic house tours to getting her hands dirty disassembling a log cabin, Jennifer will get involved however she can. Our job would be much more difficult without her assistance and collaboration. Congratulations Jennifer, on this well-deserved honor!







Left: The front of 124 Montford Avenue, viewed from the Northeast.

Top: Section of the 1901 Deed.

Above: 1901 newspaper article on the clearing the previous house from the lot.

# 124 Montford Avenue-House or Apartments? A Short Lesson on Historical Research

Dale W. Slusser

The owner of the property at 124 Montford Avenue recently sent an inquiry to the Preservation Society inquiring about the history of their property, an apartment house obviously dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two specific statements made by the owner, describing the property, not only sparked, but guided my research: *“It doesn’t seem to ever have been a single family home the way it’s laid out. Also, the big vacant lot beside it looks like it has never been built on”*. During a few days of laser-focused research, I concentrated on trying to answer those two implicit questions--Was it ever a single-family dwelling? And why does it have a large accompanying vacant lot that appears to never have been built on? As I suspected, in uncovering the answers to those two questions, the overall history of the property revealed itself. I thought this would be a good lesson to share on how to perform historical research on a property, using the resources available to us via the internet and the increasing availability of digitized records and resources.

Although sometimes I first do a bit of internet browsing on a property, the primary thing that I do is a thorough deed search to develop a “chain of title” for the property, starting with the current owner. By accessing the county GIS (Geographic Information System) I access the current property information, which includes not only the current owner’s name but also gives the latest deed reference (book and page number), from whence one can begin the chain of title. The deed search is then done by accessing the register of deeds website. In the case of the 124 Montford Avenue property, I first traced the chain of title back to 1903, as my pre-deed-search internet browsing had brought up a photo of the property at the Buncombe County Special Collections with the following description: “Either Julius Martin or E.A. Niel may have built this house. Niel is in the 1903 city directory as its first occupant.”<sup>1</sup> The 1903 deed<sup>2</sup> showed the property transfer from Julius C. Martin to E. A. Niel--actually I arrived at this deed by using what is called “the recital” in the deeds, which were in most older deeds, which references

the previous deed or deeds for that property. The recital usually begins with a phrase such as: “Being the same property conveyed to the grantor...”, and usually follows immediately after the property description. In our case this was helpful as (and here is a mini-lesson) although Niel’s name was correct on the deed, on the deed database it was incorrectly transcribed as “Edward R. Neil” instead of “Edward A. Niel”--misspelling both his middle initial as well as his last name. So, when searching for records, I always search under suspected misspellings, such as “Neil” instead of the correct “Niel”, in fact I even found a few records (not in the deeds) where they spelled his name “Neal”.

In the 1903 deed I was looking to see what price Niel paid for the property, as this often can indicate whether the property was a vacant lot or had a house on it. Of course, the deeds don’t always give the price, or sometimes they give a vague sum such as, “for Ten dollars and other considerations...”. But in our case the deed indicated that Niel purchased the property for \$1,450, and although Julius Martin had cobbled the property from two previous transfers<sup>3</sup> in 1901, for which cumulatively he paid only about \$800, the increase in the sale price, which can be an indicator of an “improvement” (like building a house on the lot), in my experience was not sufficient enough to confirm that Martin had “improved” the property, by building a new house on it, before selling it to Niel. However, I did find a newspaper article that indicated that Martin had “improved” the lot, not by building a new house, but by clearing out an old house! (A modern-day preservationist’s nightmare!) In a June 28, 1901 newspaper article titled, “Old House Comes Down”, it was reported that among the improvements being made to Montford Avenue is “the demolition of the dilapidated building that has long marred the beauty of the avenue opposite Blake Street, located on the lot recently purchased by J. C. Martin.”<sup>4</sup> The article further described: “This building was one of the oldest in the city, its timbers when their linings were torn out, revealing the old time construction of pin ties. The workmen pulled away the last standards of the frame Wednesday evening, and the work of removing the debris is now going on.”<sup>5</sup> This “old house” shows on the 1891 Bird’s-Eye View of Asheville, on the westside of Montford Avenue directly across from Blake Street, as described in the article. Also from my experience, I knew that even in 1903 in Asheville, that a house such as that built at 124 Montford Avenue, would have cost at least double the price Niel paid for the property. So, this indicated to me that Martin most likely did not build the house, merely he just cleared and cleaned up the lot. Of course, then I had to find evidence to verify if Niel built the house.

Although the newspapers, during that time often reported the building permits that were issued, and sometimes even reported the architect and or builder of a house being constructed, I could find no reference of the kind for the house at 124 Montford Avenue. However, along with the fact that the house address does not show in the city directories

until 1904 (albeit as 120 Montford) then showing Niel as the resident, I also found a **deed of trust** which Niel had taken out in July of 1903 for \$3,000<sup>6</sup>, just two months after purchasing the lot from Martin. A deed of trust, like a mortgage, pledges real property to secure a loan. This document is used instead of a mortgage in some states. While a mortgage involves two parties, a deed of trust involves three: the trustor (the borrower), the lender (sometimes called a “beneficiary”), and the trustee. The trustee is an independent third party that holds “bare” or “legal” title to the property. The trustee’s primary function is to sell the property at a public auction if the trustor defaults on payments.<sup>7</sup> The \$3,000 that Niel borrowed is more in line with the cost of a house of that size, and because Niel borrowed the money after the purchase of the property, I find these two occurrences to be compelling evidence that Niel used that money to build the house.

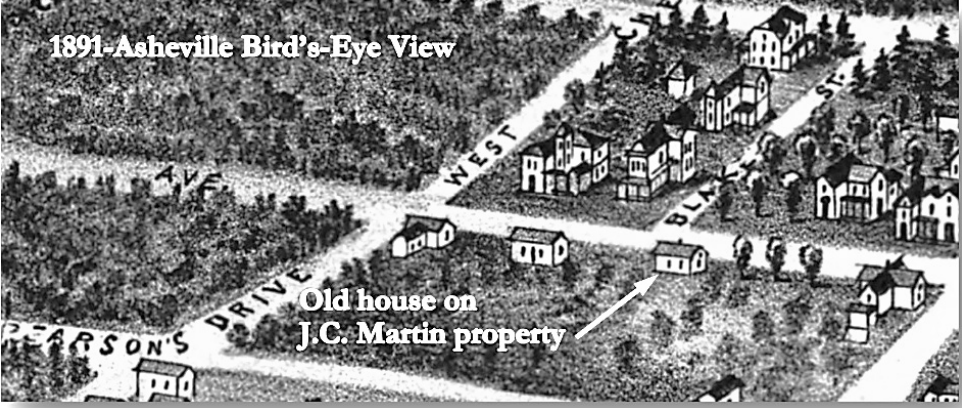
Another way to reinforce or support that Niel built the house in 1903 was to research who was “E. A. Neil”, and to follow his movements during the years 1903-1904. For this, I used newspapers.com and genealogybank.com, but there are also other sources of digitized newspapers databases online available to researchers. Using these sources, as well as general web searching, I found the Edward Anthony Niel was a native of Selma, Alabama, who was born on July 3, 1865 to Andrew J. & Elizabeth (Peake) Niel.<sup>8</sup> Following in the footsteps of his father, in 1894, Niel started working for the railroad, first serving in various positions with the Mobile and Birmingham Railroad, but then in 1899 he secured the position of assistant general freight agent for the Southern Railroad at Washington, DC.<sup>9</sup> It was while living in Washington DC that Niel’s wife, Flora Stewart Niel fell ill, necessitating their seeking a more mild climate, at least temporarily. In November of 1899, the Selma, AL newspaper announced that “Mr. & Mrs. E. A. Niel reached the city yesterday from Washington, DC, and are the guests of Mr. & Mrs. M. W. Walker. Mrs. Niel will spend the winter in Asheville.”<sup>10</sup> About two weeks later, in December 1899, the Asheville newspaper reported that “Edward Niel, freight agent of the Southern, left for Washington today after visiting Mrs. Niel, who is a guest at Mrs. Basler’s.”<sup>11</sup> A quick search of the 1899 Asheville City Directory<sup>12</sup> revealed that

“Mrs. Basler’s”, was a boarding house at 40 N. French Broad Avenue, operated by Mrs. Agnes T. Basler. I’ll not glut you with all the references, but will summarize that by searching the newspapers, I discovered that the Niels, mainly Mrs. Niel, continued to winter in Asheville in 1900 and 1901, while maintaining their residence in Washington DC. In February of 1901, Mrs. Niel was reported as seriously ill while wintering in Asheville. However, she seemed to rally and by 1902 she was able to move with her husband to Atlanta, where he had been transferred. Actually, as head of his department, Niel coordinated the moving of his entire office and staff from Washington DC to Atlanta in the Fall of 1902. I assume he was hoping that Atlanta would be a better climate for his wife--however in the May of 1903, the Asheville papers were abuzz with the news that “SOUTHERN OFFICIAL MOVES TO ASHEVILLE- MR. E. A. NEIL [sp] GENERAL FRIEGHT AGENT RENTS A HOUSE ON MONTFORD”.<sup>13</sup> The article further reported that “Mrs. Niel is at L. S. Rorison’s on Montford [65 Montford Avenue]”, and that because “Mrs. Niel’s health is so much better here and both are so much pleased with Asheville”, that the Niel’s have decided to make Asheville their permanent residence, with E. A. Niel continuing to work from Atlanta. And “to this end yesterday”, it was further reported, the family “rented Mrs. H. Lamar Gudger’s cottage on Montford which Mrs. Niel and children will occupy this week.”<sup>14</sup> Modern-day readers would

In the 1903 deed I was looking to see what price Niel paid for the property, as this often can indicate whether the property was a vacant lot or had a house on it.

recognize “H. Lamar Gudger’s cottage” as the house at 89 Montford Avenue at the corner of Montford and Bearden Avenues. In 1978, the Lamar Gudger House was acquired by the Preservation Society of Asheville and Buncombe County and became one its first success stories, and today the house is used as the offices of Montford Family Law.

As the above-mentioned article, was written on May 12, 1903, the day after the Niels had rented the Gudger cottage, and just the day before they signed the deed of transfer for the lot from Julius C. Martin (dated May 13, 1903) it is obvious that there was no house for them to move into on the lot, as they would not have gone to the expense and trouble of signing a rental agreement for two days! Com-



Mrs. Lamar Gudger’s cottage at 89 Montford Avenue, circa 1915.



bine that with the July deed of trust for \$3,000, and the fact that the address does not show up until the 1904 city directory, I feel safe to say that the overwhelming evidence confirms that the Niels had the house built at 124 Montford Avenue, sometime in the summer-fall of 1903.

Tragically, Mrs. Niel did not get to enjoy her new residence for very long. On April 19, 1904, just a few months after the Niels had moved into their new house, the Asheville newspaper reported: “Mrs E. A. Niel, wife of the general freight agent of the Southern railway, is seriously ill at her home on Montford Avenue and little hope is entertained for her recovery. Mr. Niel, whose headquarters are in Atlanta, has arrived in response to telegrams announcing Mrs. Niel’s critical condition, and is now at the bedside.”<sup>15</sup> And not surprisingly, the April 20, 1904 Asheville Citizen Times, reported the sad news: “Mrs. E. A. Niel, wife of the general freight agent of the Southern railway, died at 6:05 o’clock yesterday morning at the home, 120 Montford Avenue”.<sup>16</sup> The same day, her obituary in the Montgomery Advertiser, Montgomery, AL reported that “For Five years, she had been ill with consumption.”<sup>17</sup> Of course, “consumption” was the polite word for Tuberculosis, which obviously was why the Niels had moved to Asheville, which then was a premier “health resort” for those suffering with tuberculosis.

Now that we have settled not only who built the house, but that the house was built as a single-family residence, it now begs the intriguing question-When did it become an apartment house? And of course, implicit in that question are also the questions of who and why? To answer the short question of when, I consulted the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. From 1867 to 1977, the Sanborn Map Company of Pelham, New York, produced large-scale (usually 50 feet to the inch) color maps of commercial and industrial districts of some 12,000 towns and cities in North America to assist fire insurance companies in setting rates and terms. The intervals between new map editions for a given town or city in the early decades of the twentieth century varied according to the pace and scale of urban growth — from a few years to more than five years. The maps were designed to assist fire insurance agents in determining the degree of hazard associated with a particular property and therefore show the size, shape, and construction of dwellings, commercial buildings, and factories as well as fire walls, locations of windows and doors, sprinkler systems, and types of roofs. The maps also indicate widths and names of streets, property boundaries, building use, and house and block numbers.<sup>18</sup> I access the Sanborn Maps through [nclive.org](http://nclive.org), using my Buncombe County Library card, however, there are other websites where they can be accessed as well.

Looking at the Sanborn Maps for Asheville, I noticed that the footprint of the house at 124 Montford Avenue significantly increased from the 1917 map to the 1925 map, indicating that the house must have been turned into apartments somewhere between 1917 and 1925. Looking at the 1925 map and comparing it to the 1917 map, I noticed several changes to the property. First, it was obvious that the house was expanded to the rear with a 3-story addition (signified by the “3” on the lower left of the house footprint), which matches its current configuration. Another two changes show in the rear yard. First, the existing two-story garage (signified by the “A” on the plan) appears to have been turned and moved slightly northwest, with the addition of a one-story garage bay to the northwest. The second change to the rear of the property that shows on the 1925 map is the addition of a small one-story dwelling to the southwest, which shows on the map as addressed as “124-1/2”. This small cottage, known in the day (1930’s-1950’s) as the “Tiny Cottage”, is still used today as the most popular unit in the apartment complex.

One change that shows on the 1925 map is that the front porch that originally wrapped around the southside of the house, to the bay window, seems to have had the southside section torn away. However, the 1951 Sanborn map shows the southside section intact, but as enclosed, just as it is now. I believe the 1925 map was an error-but nonetheless the fact remains that the original porch (prior to 1925) was fully open on both the east (front) and south sides. A circa 1911 postcard, titled “Montford Avenue, Asheville, NC”<sup>19</sup>, shows both sides of the porch as fully open.

Once I narrowed the timeframe to between 1917-1925, it was easy to figure out the “who”, by looking at the Chain of Title that I had previously prepared. It turns out that the Niel family held onto the house until 1909, five years after the death of Flora Niel. In 1909, Edward A. Niel and Edna Mary Niel sold the property to J. L. Alexander and his wife Florence M. Alexander. But before finding out which owner it was that may have built the apartments, I had to satisfy my inquisitiveness, as to why E. A. Niel held on to the

house, and who was “Edna Mary Niel” shown on the 1909 deed? I will not tax my readers with how I found the answers-but I will summarize my findings. What I had missed in my earlier research was that Flora Stewart Niel’s mother, Mrs. Anna J. Stewart, who by 1903 was a widow, had moved into the new house with her daughter Flora and her husband and their children, Edward and Flora (*both same names as their parents*). After the death of Flora Niel in 1904, Mrs. Stewart remained in the home, no doubt to take care of her motherless grandchildren, whose father, Edward A. Niel continued to commute out of town to work. Niel was working from Atlanta when his wife passed away, but in September of 1904, just a few months later, he accepted a new position as the General Freight Traffic Manager of the Atlantic & North Carolina railroad, headquartered in Goldsboro, NC,<sup>20</sup> and then in 1905, Niel resigned that position and accepted a new position as Traffic Manager and Vice-President of the Coal Properties with the Buffalo & Susquehanna Railroad.<sup>21</sup> Apparently Niel’s mother-in-law had to take care of the children during his frequently long absences. In November of 1908, Edward Niel remarried to Edna Mary Post in Buffalo, NY. Up until 1909, the Asheville City Directories listed Edward Niel and Mrs. Anna J. Stewart as living at 124 Montford Avenue. The 1909 directory showed only Mrs. Anna J. Stewart, no doubt as the Niel family had moved to Buffalo, NY by then.

As mentioned earlier, the Alexanders purchased the property in 1909 from the Niel family, but as they sold the property in 1921 to R. C. & Ida Scruggs, that meant that it may have been either the Alexanders or the Scruggs that turned the house at 124 Montford Avenue into an apartment building. So, my next step was to search the newspapers for any revealing clues. I first searched for clues using the name R. C. Scruggs, as I thought that since the Alexanders owned the property in 1917 when it was still a single-family dwelling, and the changes showed in 1925, that it mostly likely was the Scruggs family that made the changes. Although I did find references to the Scruggs operating the house as the “Haldane” apartments, I could not verify that they were the ones to turn the house into apartments, or whether they purchased the house as apartments. So, it was on to researching the J. L. Alexander family and their movements and interactions, as it seems most likely that it was they who turned the house into apartments.

When the Alexanders purchased the house in 1909, James Lawrence Alexander was acting as the manager of the Battery Park Hotel, one of Asheville’s premier hotels of the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, which first opened in 1886. Alexander managed the hotel for the heirs of Frank Coxe, the original owner. Not only was Alexander successfully transitioning the hotel into the twentieth century (transitioning carriage service into chauffeured automobiles), but it was reported that the hotel which had “played an important part in the many advertising campaigns which had been conducted in behalf of Asheville,”<sup>22</sup> and that under “Mr. Alexander’s regime the hotel paid the biggest profits of it’s existence.” The Alexander family, which included James and his wife Florence, and their five children had been living at the Battery Park Hotel prior to purchasing the house at 124 Montford Avenue. The family removed “from the Battery Park Hotel to their residence on Montford Avenue” near the end of November of 1909.<sup>23</sup>

In 1914, J. L. Alexander decided not to renew his lease on the Battery Park hotel management<sup>24</sup>, and then in 1915 Alexander accepted a new position as the manager of the Washington Hotel in St. Louis, MO.<sup>25</sup> One year later, Alexander sold his interests in the St. Louis hotel and accepted a new position as the manager of the Hotel Petersburg in Petersburg, VA. Although the family joined J. L. Alexander in St. Louis and Petersburg at times, they still maintained their Asheville home. In fact, Mrs. Alexander and the children often returned to Asheville for long stays. But then in 1918, the Asheville papers announced that Mrs. J. L. Alexander was living at and operating the boarding house, “Shadowlawn” at 103 Montford Avenue.<sup>26</sup> Of course, that piqued my interest! James L. Alexander had put the 124 Montford Avenue into his wife’s name in 1910<sup>27</sup>, just a few months after they had acquired the property. So why, in 1918, was Mrs. J. L. Alexander living in another house, though she still owned the house at 124 Montford? I immediately went back to the Buncombe County deeds to see if J. L. or “Mrs. J. L.” had purchased another or additional property on Montford Avenue?

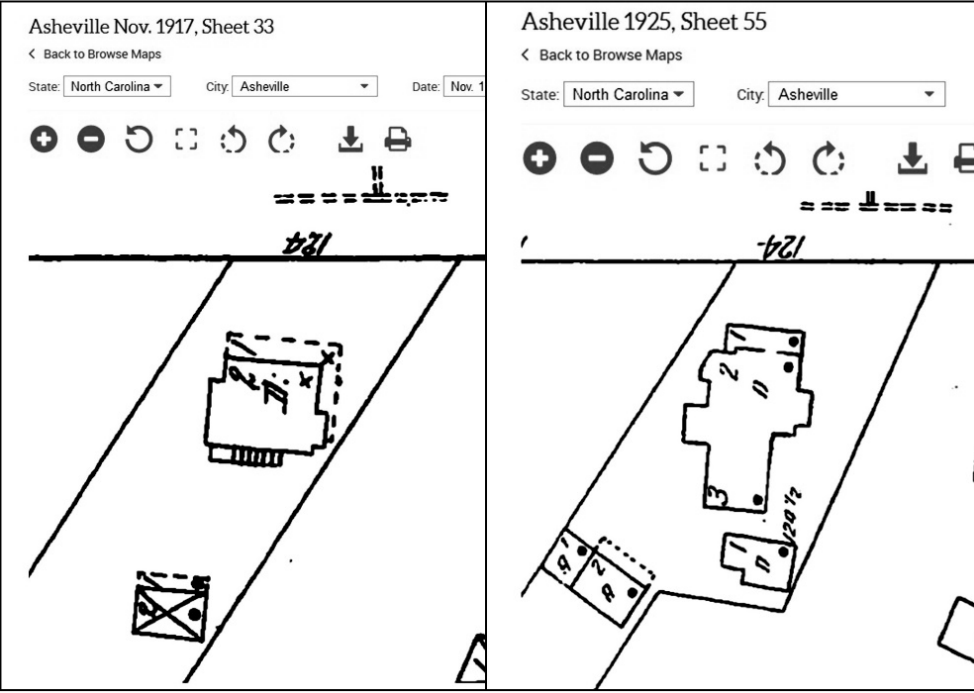
Although the search of the deeds indicated that they had not purchased the additional house, it did reveal something that explained why Mrs. J. L. Alexander had moved to another house and was operating it as an income-producing property. In February 1919, the Alex-

continued on the next page

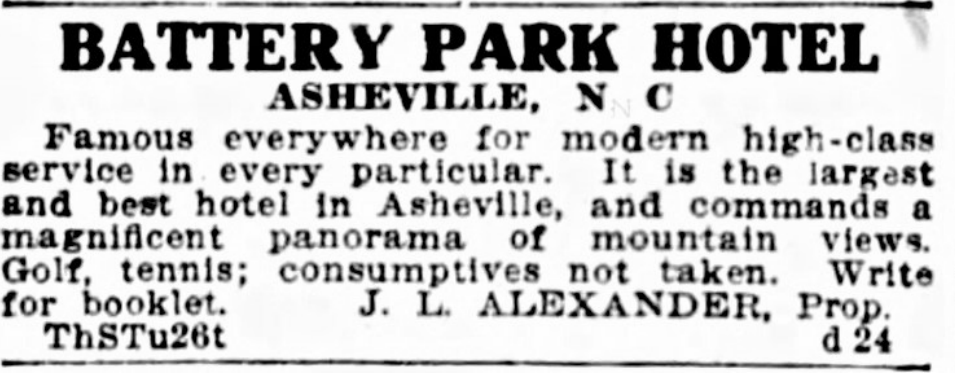


The “Cherry Tree Lot” is now used for parking and outdoor lounging.

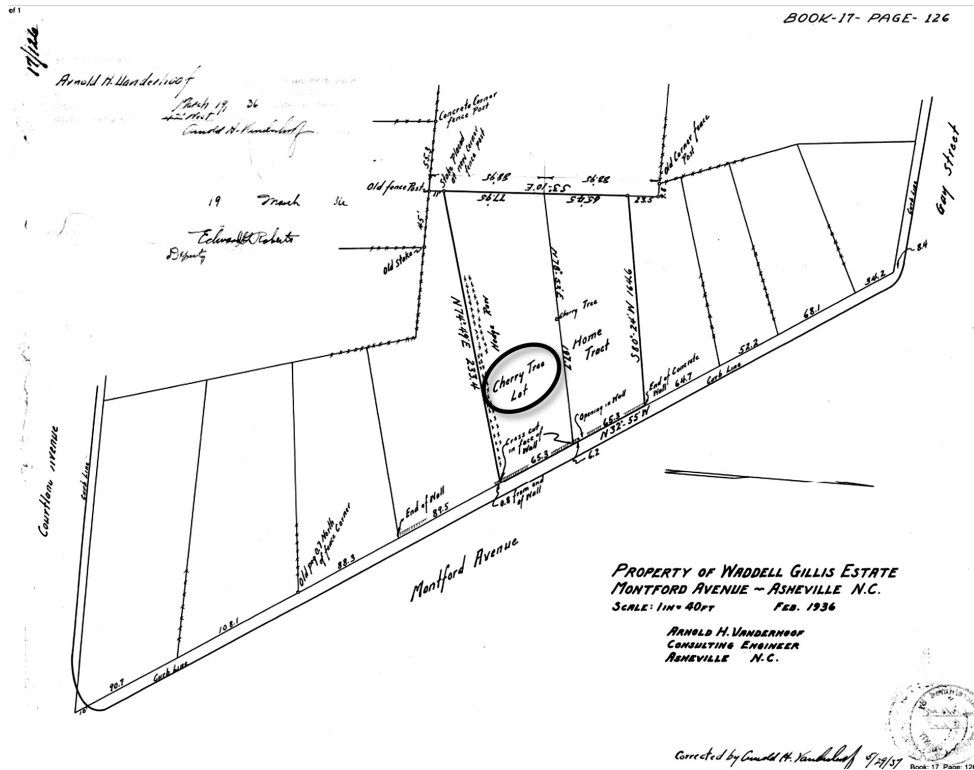
# Looking at the Sanborn Maps for Asheville, I noticed that the footprint of the house at 124 Montford Avenue significantly increased from the 1917 map to the 1925 map, indicating that the house must have been turned into apartments somewhere between 1917 and 1925.



The “Tiny Cottage” is the most popular apartment unit at 124 Montford Avenue.



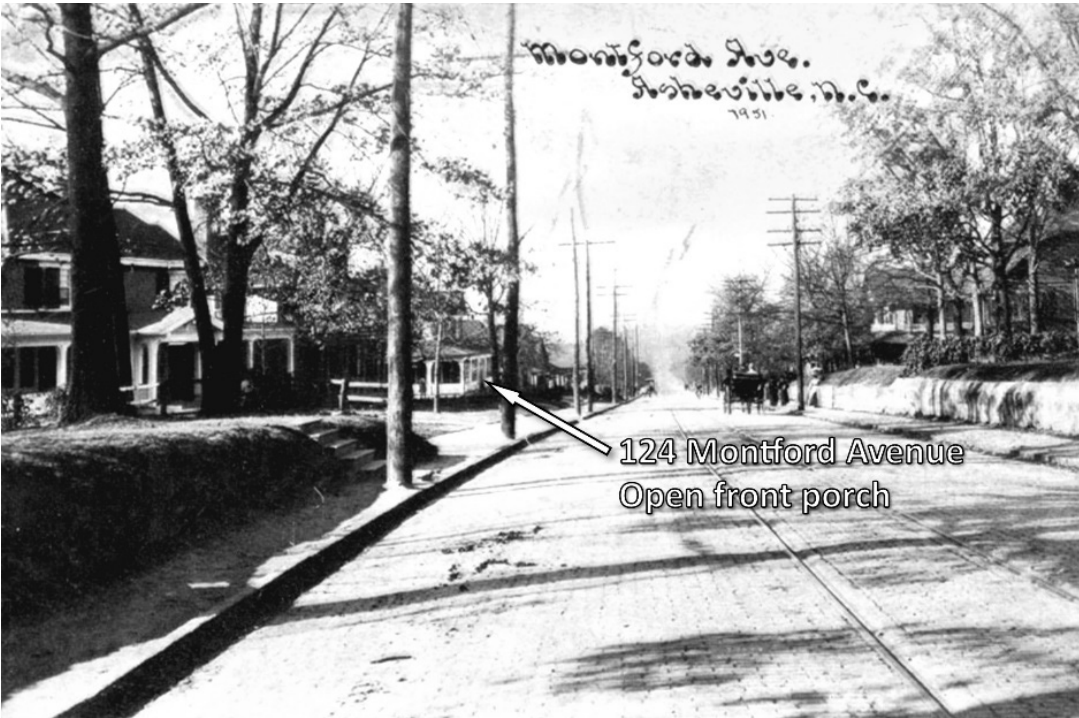
The 1919 apartment house additions clearly show on the side and rear of the original house.



The “Cherry Tree Lot” is now used for parking and outdoor lounging.



# 124 Montford *continued*



anders filed for a legal separation, as they had already been “living separate and apart on account of divers disputes and unhappy differences”.<sup>28</sup> Although this may bring up personal issues in their relationship, which are not in the purview of our study, the “Deed of Separation” is important to understanding how the apartments came to be. First, it explains why Mrs. J. L. Alexander, who was now known as Florence M. Alexander, had moved to 103 Montford Avenue. Also, the four-page document is very detailed giving numerous terms of the separation. One important term was that J. L. Alexander paid Florence \$1,500 in lieu of her “dower interest” in his property, which meant that she relinquished any claims or interests in J. L. Alexander’s property if he were to pre-decease her. And on other hand, another term of the agreement was that Florence “shall own and enjoy independent of any claim or right of J. L. Alexander all the property of the said Florence M. Alexander, both real and personal, now held by her or which shall hereafter belong or come to her, as her sole separate property...”<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, in June of 1919, while still living at 103 Montford, Florence put the following ad in the newspaper under the “Unfurnished” rental column: “124 Montford Avenue-9 rooms, 2 baths, screened sleeping porch, coal and gas ranges. Garage. Two servants’ rooms. Apply Mrs. Florence M. Alexander, 103 Montford Avenue.”<sup>30</sup> But then, just a few months later, Florence came up with a brilliant solution.

“APARTMENT HOUSE ON MONTFORD AVENUE-MRS. J. L. ALEXANDER BUILDING HOUSE AT NO. 124”<sup>31</sup>, announced the December 19, 1919 edition of the *Asheville Citizen Times*. The article further reported that: “Work has started in converting the residence of Mrs. J. L. Alexander at No. 124 Montford avenue, into a large apartment house, containing three stories, the cost to be several thousand dollars.”<sup>32</sup> There it was-the answers to the “who and why”, as well as the “when”! Just an interesting note--it was Florence Alexander, not the Scruggs, who first named the apartments “The Haldane”. I surmise that it was named

for her son, Dana Haldane Alexander, who at the time was serving as a pilot with the Royal Flying Corps of the British Army in England and France.<sup>33</sup>

Now, for the final question. “Was the large vacant lot to the north of the building part of the original property? Well, the answer to that question was found by following the deed transfers in the chain of title. The chain of title revealed that the vacant lot, described in the deeds as “the Cherry tree lot”, did not become part of the apartment house property until 1943.<sup>34</sup> The “cherry tree lot” was part of the original property of the Elisabeth W. Gillis house at 134 Montford. The lot was sold out of the Gillis family after the 1936 death of Mrs. Gillis’ daughter, Miss Waddell Gillis, and shows on a plat prepared for the Waddell Gillis estate.<sup>35</sup> In 1943, sisters Anne & Margaret Coble purchased the vacant lot (not sure why), and a few months later they purchased the 124 Montford Property. The following year, 1944, they sold both properties as one two-tract property, and it has remained as such since then.

All questions answered with relative ease, but with lots of research time. In college, when I trained to be a librarian, our instructors often reminded us that it was not important that we know the answer to a patron’s inquiry, but that it was more important that we knew WHERE to find the answer. So it is with historical research!

- IMAGE CREDITS:
- **Photo of front of 124 Montford Avenue; “Tiny Cottage” photo; Rear of 124 Montford photo; Cherry tree lot photo**-all by Jamie Moody, Finance and Operations Manager, Preservation Society of Asheville & Buncombe County.
  - **Recital in 1903 Deed**- 05/18/1903 Julius C. Martin to Edward A Niel (of the City of Atlanta) MONTFORD AVENUE Db. 129/484. -Buncombe County Register of Deeds.
  - **“Old House Comes Down”**- Asheville Citizen Times, June 28, 1901, page 1.
  - **“Birds-Eye View, 1891”**-Library of Congress website: <https://www.loc.gov/item/75694894/> , captions by Dale Slusser
  - **E. A. Neil photo**–“Edward A. Niel”, by Ernest Briars, Correspondent, Rochester. Baltimore & Ohio Magazine, Volume XXVII, No. 1, January 1941, published by Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, Baltimore, MD.
  - **H. Lamar Gudger House**- at 89 Montford Ave. -Collection Number:16580 ID: A610-8, Buncombe County Special Collections.
  - **Sanborn Maps**-via nclive.org, captions by Dale Slusser
  - **Montford Ave. postcard**-Collection Number 18398 Image ID AB431, Williams, C.U. (Bloomington IL), Publisher –Buncombe County Special Collections
  - **Battery Park Advert**- *Boston Evening Transcript* (Boston, Massachusetts), January 7, 1909, page 15.
  - **Cherry Tree Plat**-03/19/1936 Waddell Gillis Estate PLAT MONTFORD AVENUE Db. 17/126. -Buncombe County Register of Deeds.

- ENDNOTES
- <sup>1</sup> Image #A630-8- Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina.
  - <sup>2</sup> 05/18/1903 Julius C. Martin to Edward A Niel (of the City of Atlanta) MONTFORD AVENUE Db. 129/484. -Buncombe County Register of Deeds.
  - <sup>3</sup> Deed recital states: “Being western portion of the lot acquired from Donald Gillis ...deed dated April 27, 1901...in book 120, page 3...and the triangular lot conveyed by Elizabeth J. Wiggins to Julius C. Martin by deed dated June 13, 1901...in book 116, page 417...”.
  - <sup>4</sup> “OLD HOUSE COMES DOWN-ONE THAT MARRIED BEAUTY OF AVENUE”, *Asheville Citizen Times*, June 28, 1901, page 1.
  - <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
  - <sup>6</sup> 07/31/1903 Edward A & Flora Niel to D C Waddell (party of the second part), Tench C. Coxe, Mary Coxe, Frank Coxe Estate (parties of the third part) [D/T] CORRECTED 6/3/2020 Db. 56/479. “Whereas Edward A Niel is justly indebted to the said parties of the third Part for the sum of Three Thousand dollars (\$3,000)...as reference to one promissory note...”
  - <sup>7</sup> “What’s the Difference Between a Mortgage and Deed of Trust?” by Amy Loftsgordon, Attorney. <https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/whats-the-difference-between-mortgage-deed-trust.html>
  - <sup>8</sup> “Edward A. Niel”, by Ernest Briars, Correspondent, Rochester. *Baltimore & Ohio Magazine*, Volume XXVII, No. 1, January 1941, published by Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, Baltimore, MD.
  - <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
  - <sup>10</sup> *The Selma Times*, Selma, Alabama, November 25, 1899, page 4.
  - <sup>11</sup> *Asheville Citizen Times*, December 11, 1899, page 4.
  - <sup>12</sup> Maloney’s Asheville, N.C. City Directory [1899-1900], J.L. Hill Print. Co., Richmond, VA, and Maloney Directory Co., Atlanta, GA., page 140. Accessed at: <https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/24890?ln=en> (Note: also available at the Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina.)
  - <sup>13</sup> *Asheville Weekly Citizen*, May 12, 1903, page 2.
  - <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
  - <sup>15</sup> *Asheville Citizen Times*, April 19, 1904, page 5.
  - <sup>16</sup> *Asheville Citizen Times*, April 20, 1904, page 8.
  - <sup>17</sup> *Montgomery Advertiser*, Montgomery, AL, April 20, 1904, page 6.
  - <sup>18</sup> Info from: <https://web.lib.unc.edu/nc-maps/sanborn.php> and <https://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/sanborn/san4a1.html>
  - <sup>19</sup> Postcard titled: “Montford Avenue, Asheville, NC”- Collection Number 18398 ID AB431, Williams, C.U. (Bloomington IL), Publisher –Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina.
  - <sup>20</sup> *The Daily Journal*, New Bern, NC, September 17, 1904, page 4.
  - <sup>21</sup> *Alabama Beacon*, Greensboro, AL, May 24, 1905, page 1.
  - <sup>22</sup> *Asheville Citizen Times*, October 14, 1914, page 7.
  - <sup>23</sup> *Asheville Citizen Times*, November 17, 1909, page 5.
  - <sup>24</sup> *Asheville Citizen Times*, October 14, 1914, page 7.
  - <sup>25</sup> *Asheville Citizen Times*, October 5, 1915, page 6.
  - <sup>26</sup> *Asheville Citizen Times*, May 19, 1918, page 24.
  - <sup>27</sup> 01/03/1910 James L. Alexander to Florence M. Alexander MONTFORD AVENUE Db. 160/127. -Buncombe County Register of Deeds.
  - <sup>28</sup> 02/21/1919 James L. Alexander to Florence M. Alexander DEED OF SEPARATION Db. 228/54. -Buncombe County Register of Deeds.
  - <sup>29</sup> 02/21/1919 James L. Alexander to Florence M. Alexander DEED OF SEPARATION Db. 228/55. -Buncombe County Register of Deeds.
  - <sup>30</sup> *Asheville Citizen Times*, June 22, 1919, page 22.
  - <sup>31</sup> *Asheville Citizen Times*, December 19, 1919, page 9 .
  - <sup>32</sup> Ibid
  - <sup>33</sup> “Asheville Boy Gets unusual Distinction-Lieut. Dana H. Alexander of the Royal Flying Corps, First Among Six Hundred”-*Asheville Citizen Times*, July 25, 1918, page 14.
  - <sup>34</sup> 03/29/1943 Cole D. & Marjorie Scruggs Genge to Anne Coble (“the Cherry tree lot”) Db. 548/290. And 04/13/1943 R. C. & Ida G. Scruggs to Anne & Margaret Coble MONTFORD AVE (Apartment house lot) Db. 550/133. -Buncombe County Register of Deeds.
  - <sup>35</sup> 03/19/1936 Waddell Gillis Estate PLAT MONTFORD AVENUE Db. 17/126. -Buncombe County Register of Deeds.

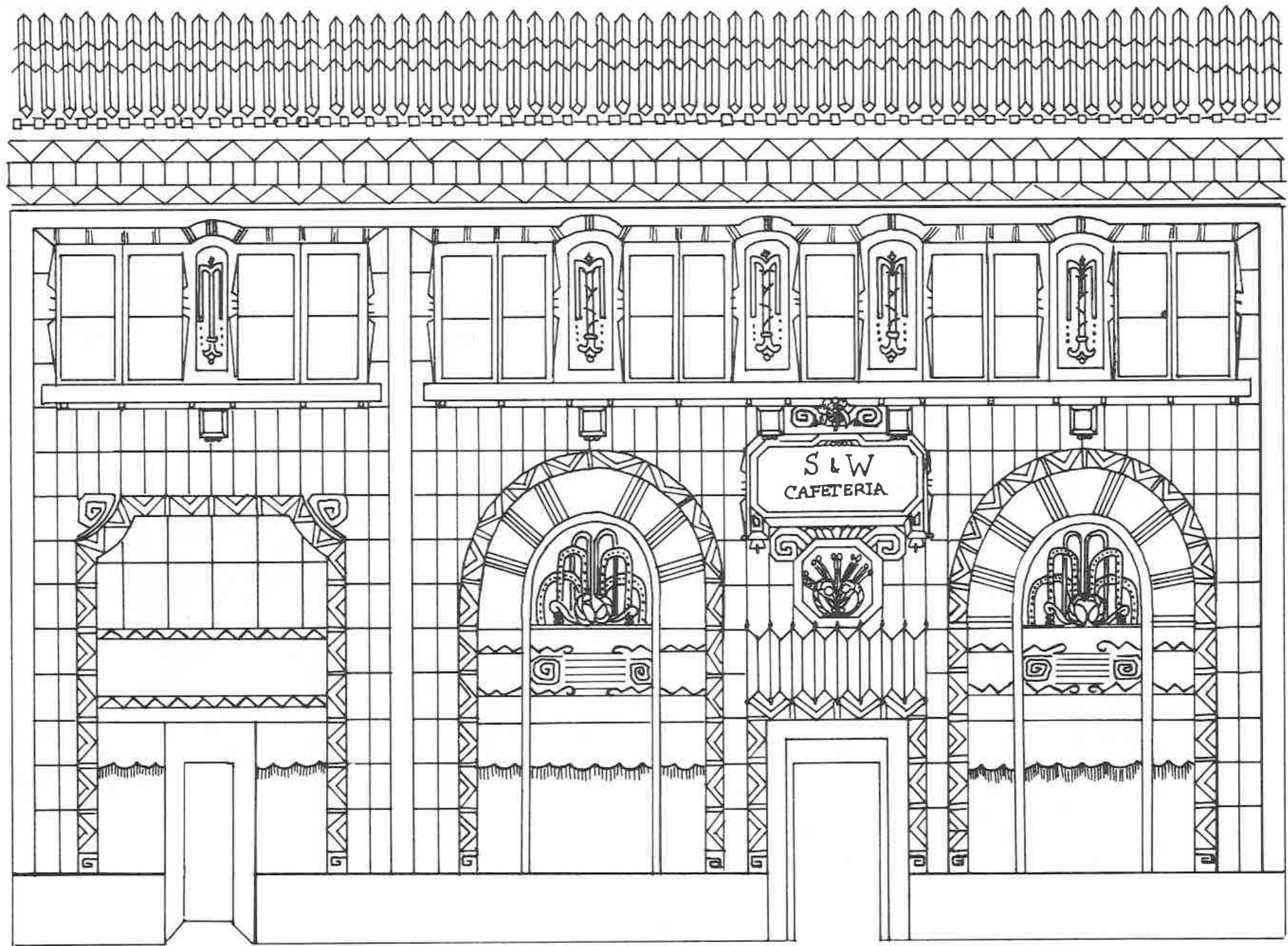
## Follow us on Social Media



PreservationAVL



## Color Me!



## Become A Member

*psabc.org*